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SUBJECT: CAMEROON'S SOUTH WEST GOVERNOR TALKS BAKASSI, SCNC

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In a March 10 meeting with Pol/Econ Chief, Governor of the South West Region Louis Eyeya Zanga said his region was blessed with fertile land and good forest resources but had too few roads. The priority in Bakassi (which is in his region) is security and roads, he said. The separatist SCNC is marginal, he claimed, arguing that he is tolerant of some activity but has to draw the line at times to keep the SCNC from becoming a bigger problem. End summary.

Bakassi  
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¶2. (SBU) It will take time to stabilize Bakassi, given the presence of "professional" Niger Delta bandits and years of neglect from Nigeria, according to Zanga, who has been involved in Bakassi issues for almost 15 years. Zanga believed the March 31 deployment of the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) in the area would significantly improve security, stating that "security is the fundamental" before economic development or oil exploration can take off. The biggest development priority is roads and the planned African Development Bank-funded road connecting Nigeria and Cameroon (with the recent addition of Japanese government funding) would go far to reduce tensions in the area. The government is building police and gendarme facilities and he saw these entities as essential for administration and local law and order.

SCNC  
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¶3. (SBU) P/E Chief asked about the status of the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), an illegal anglophone secessionist organization whose headquarters is in the South West Region. Zanga thought the SCNC was "a residual, generational" problem led by nostalgic, marginal individuals with a "dream of a Cameroon in the past". The media and Diaspora keep it alive, he added, noting that he meets on occasion with SCNC leaders but that the young people don't support it. Zanga thought they had no political base and he has instructed his police and gendarmes to ignore them as much as possible. That said, "I can't ignore certain things," such as groups meeting to talk about secession, which is punishable under the penal code. The SCNC fails to declare meetings, as it is supposed to do, he said. He thought that if the government doesn't intervene to stop meetings focused on secession, the SCNC might become a bigger problem. Zanga insisted that he "lets a lot of things go" with the SCNC and is not very repressive, but that he has to draw the line and "we're not as advanced as the U.S." in terms of political tolerance.

Comment  
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14. (SBU) Zanga is an impressive interlocutor with years of experience in the region and previously as a governor of North Province. (He visits the U.S. at least once a year to see his daughter, who won the DV lottery). His views on the security priorities of Bakassi make sense. He was willing to talk about the SCNC at length and, while he probably underplayed the organization's draw, we concur that the SCNC seems to be a marginal group stuck in the past. Pol/Econ Chief tried during the South West visit to meet with two alleged SCNC leaders but both were elusive and the meetings never happened. One contact suggested to us that the SCNC is stronger in Buea than Zanga would like to admit. Zanga appears determined to keep the SCNC under wraps, preferably quietly but with force if necessary.  
GARVEY